



Exploring Redwood Creek



“West 6 miles principally along a ridge brushy and timbered with Hemlock, Pine [Douglas fir] and Cedar [coast redwood]. Some of the Cedars was [sic] the noblest trees I had ever seen being 12 or 15 feet in diameter tall and straight and handsome. I encamped in a prairie [sic] with the Ocean in sight.”

From the journal of Jedediah Smith while camped in Gans Prairie above Redwood Creek, May 19, 1828.

Revisiting the Past

The “noblest trees” described by explorer Jedediah Smith and his clerk Harrison Rogers during their 1827-1828 California expedition would one day nearly vanish from the Redwood Creek valley. At the time, however, this forest was deemed almost impenetrable by the motley party of 18 mountain men and more than 250 pack animals. From Gans Prairie, they journeyed north through the mountainous, foggy, wet homeland of the Yurok and Chilula peoples who had lived along lower Redwood Creek for millennia.

Ultimately, the Smith expedition and the discovery of gold on the Trinity River in 1848 led to the invasion and settlement of the area by Americans in the 1850s. In the ensuing years, thousands of acres of ancient forests were cut to provide lumber for developing communities. But the discovery of the then tallest known tree in Tall Trees Grove in 1963 helped to save the remaining old-growth stands along Redwood Creek, culminating in the creation of Redwood National Park by Congress in 1968.

Parklands Today

Today, a journey along Redwood Creek chronicles dramatic change. Modern explorers will observe green, fertile hillsides—the early results of National Park Service restoration projects. Bulldozers have removed logging roads, and redeposited tons of soil upslope where vegetation quickly recolonizes on its own accord.

Yet, a closer look reveals logging’s legacy: Second-growth forests have replaced ancient streamside redwoods. Extensive and intensive erosion into the creek has produced high gravel bars, while increased silt inhibits the survival of salmon eggs.

Still, Redwood Creek contains many areas of serene beauty. Visitors can explore narrow, steep-walled side streams, swim in clear pools, and camp along sun-baked gravel bars. Wildlife sightings may include black bear, Roosevelt elk, flocks of mergansers, diving ospreys, scurrying mink, or a family of otters. And the freedom to wander through magnificent groves of coast redwoods—“tall and straight and handsome”—should be enjoyed by everyone. Redwood Creek is a place to experience nature’s beauty, renew the spirit, and witness active efforts to speed the processes that will return the noble forest to the valley.

Protect Yourself, Protect Your Parks

Before visiting Redwood Creek, please remember that the wild animals, plants, waterways, and other natural features, as well as certain weather conditions that occur here, can be dangerous:

- Redwood Creek is a powerful and dangerous river during high water flows. From October to May, check with a park ranger or inquire at any information center for the latest conditions.
- Mountain lions, black bears, Roosevelt elk, ticks, and poison oak are found along Redwood Creek. Please take proper precautions.
- Treat all water before consuming.
- Store food properly and pack-out all garbage—even food scraps.
- Bury human waste 100 feet from water in a hole 6–8 inches deep.
- Fires are restricted to established fire pits (except on Redwood Creek gravel bars).
- Camping is permitted on Redwood Creek gravel bars upstream of Bond Creek, and no closer than ¼-mile from Tall Trees Grove. A free permit is required, available from the Kuchel Visitor Center.

Trails of Redwood Creek

Tall Trees Trail

Trailhead: 6½ miles southeast of U.S. 101 on Bald Hills Road, then 6½ miles south on the unpaved Tall Trees Access Road. **Note:** *Tall Trees Access Road is accessible only via free permit from the Thomas H. Kuchel Visitor Center, Prairie Creek Visitor Center, or Crescent City Information Center. A maximum of 50 permits per day are issued on a first-come, first-served basis.*

Distance: 3½ miles, round-trip.

Description: The hike descends steeply to an alluvial redwood grove where the world’s tallest tree was identified in 1963. The loop trail through Tall Trees Grove features towering coast redwoods, stands of bigleaf maple, and California laurel.

Camping: Dispersed camping is permitted on Redwood Creek gravel bars upstream of Bond Creek, and no closer than ¼-mile from Tall Trees Grove. A free camping permit is required, available from the Thomas H. Kuchel Visitor Center near Orick, Calif.

Redwood Creek Trail

Trailhead: ½ mile east of U.S. 101 on Bald Hills Road, follow signs to trailhead and parking area.

Distance: 8 miles, one-way

Description: Despite large-scale timber harvesting and road building in the 20th century, today this cool, wind-protected stream valley remains a riparian corridor and regenerating forest. Two bridges on the trail—1½ miles from the Redwood Creek Trailhead, and at the junction with Tall Trees Trail—are only in place during summer, usually June–September.

Camping: Dispersed camping is permitted on Redwood Creek gravel bars upstream of Bond Creek and no closer than ¼-mile from Tall Trees Grove. A free camping permit is required, available only from the Thomas H. Kuchel Visitor Center near Orick, Calif.

Orick Horse Trail

Trailhead: Orick Rodeo Grounds (inquire at any information center for directions): A \$5 self-pay parking fee required at trailhead.

Distance: Varies—Four interconnecting loop trails provide several possible itineraries: Ridge Loop (7 miles), McArthur Creek Loop (14 miles), Elam Creek Loop (20 miles), and Forty-Four Creek Loop (32 miles).

Description: The loops of the Orick Horse Trail offer several days’ worth of riding or backpacking, with views of the Pacific Ocean and Orick Valley as the trail ascends a ridge and then wanders through the redwood forest.

Camping: At designated backcountry campsites only (free permit required, available from the Thomas H. Kuchel Visitor Center): Elam Creek offers a corral, picnic tables, food lockers, toilets, and non-potable water (bring drinking water); no more than 12 stock animals permitted. 44-Camp (backpackers only; no water available) offers picnic tables, food lockers, firepits, and toilet.

Dolason Prairie Trail

Trailhead: 11 miles southeast of U.S. 101 on Bald Hills Road.

Distance: 5¾ miles, one-way

Description: Pass through wildflower-studded prairies, oak woodlands, and past a restored historic sheep-herding ranch before descending into an old-growth redwood forest known as the Emerald Mile flourishing in a deep gorge along Emerald Creek; connects to Emerald Ridge and Tall Trees Trails.

Camping: None permitted

This map is for general orientation purposes only. Trail maps and guides are available from cooperating association bookstores at all information centers.

